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ABSTRACT

This review was a formative assessment project designed to introduce teacher education candidates to many of the concepts and methods related to evaluation and course assessment within the framework of an actual curriculum course. Students were afforded the opportunity to work in simulated curriculum committees. Through informed decision making processes, they designed a survey instrument, conducted interviews, and explored a variety of data-gathering techniques. In addition, they collated, analyzed, and reported their findings. The project selected for review was the practicum experience offered as part of the requirements of the Berry College (Rome, Georgia) Teacher Education Program. The students in the class surveyed a random selection of students who participated in the practicum program. In addition, they interviewed principals, teachers, and college faculty who offered practicums as part of their coursework. They collected demographic information, recorded perceptions, reviewed implementation processes, and rated experiences and competencies learned or practiced through the practicum. The research showed that high value is placed on practicums and that the program design should include experiences in active participation by students, modeling of instructional techniques, and development of lesson plans and instructional materials. (Author/LL)

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Practicum Review:
An Experiment in Curriculum Assessment

A Class Project for
Group Decision Making and Peer
Leadership Development

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Abstract

Practicum Review: An Experiment in Curriculum Assessment

By: Dr. David R. Murray and the Berry College Department of Education Spring Curriculum Class (ED301/302),1991

This Review was a formative assessment project which was designed to introduce teacher education candidates to many of the concepts and methods related to evaluation and course assessment within the framework of an actual curriculum course. Students were afforded the opportunity to work in simulated curriculum committees. Through informed decision making processes, they designed a survey instrument, conducted interviews and explored a variety of data gathering techniques. In addition, they collated , analyzed and reported their findings. The project selected for review was the practicum experience offered as a part of the requirements of the Berry College Teacher Education Program. Students surveyed a random selection of students who participated in the practicum program. In addition, they interviewed and surveyed principals, teachers and college faculty who offered practicums as a part of their coursework. They collected demographic information, recorded perceptions and reviewed implementation processes and rated experiences and competencies learned or practiced through the practicum. Major recommendations were cited for future program development.

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Practicum Review: An Experiment in Curriculum Assessment

By: Dr. David R. Murray and the Berry College Department of Education Spring Curriculum Class (ED301/302), 1991

Introduction:

Many public, private and university based laboratory schools around the nation provide early field experiences to orient teacher education candidates to a variety of teaching and learning environments. This type of immersion into the school environment has been cited to be extremely important in pre-service teacher education. In addition, students and teachers often cite a concern that a discrepancy may exist between professed and practiced pedagogy in an educational program. For these two reasons, the practicum experience was selected for review by the Spring 1991, Berry College Education Department curriculum class.

This review process had a dual purpose. First, it provided actual information which could be used to upgrade the practicum experience. Secondly, the project was used to introduce teacher education candidates to teacher involvement in assessing ongoing programs in the greater curriculum improvement process. Special emphasis was placed on developing collegial or peer leadership which is an essential component for faculty involvement in any review process. As the actual concept of teacher empowerment becomes more of a reality in the schools, teacher education candidates will need to have had experience in group dynamics and active involvement with curricular review and assessment as well as curriculum development. Further, in order for teachers to begin to transform leadership into a shared experience in the school, an introduction to this type of leadership must begin in teacher preparation programs. To these ends, this project was created.

Purpose of the Curriculum Review Project:

The focus of the review project was to assess the general perceptions of professors, school administrators, teachers and teacher education candidates towards the value of the practicum or early field experience in teacher education. Integral to this review was an examination of practicum implementation and the identification of

participants' value ratings for professional competencies as they were experienced or recommended for future inclusion. Finally, through a free response section, respondents were asked to cite their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the program. Suggestions for strengthening the program were also solicited.

Organization of the Study:

Through informed decision making processes, the curriculum class designed a survey instrument which was distributed to a population sample consisting of approximately 200 teachers, administrators, professors and education students. In addition, interviews were conducted and a variety of other data gathering techniques were explored. The quantitative data was reported as a general consensus of all responding groups (teachers, administrators, professors and education students) combined in order to identify general trends. The curriculum class students were then divided into committees by school level, for the purpose of analyzing the qualitative data. The review committees reported their findings in written commentaries which follow at the end of this report.

From the population sample of approximately 200, one hundred nineteen usable surveys were returned. Female respondents represented 76.72 percent of the population. Over 30 percent were between 20 and 30 years of age; 36 percent were between 30 and 40; 26 percent were between 40 and 50 and 8 percent were over the age of 50. The responding population represented involvement of 54.31 percent at the elementary level; 19.83 percent at the middle school level; 20.69 percent at the secondary level and 5.17 percent at the college level. Table 1 provides a general profile of the respondents by classification, educational attainment and level of teaching.

Table 1

General Information: Respondent Profile

Classification:			Highest Degree Obtained:		
Professor	6	5.08%	BA/BS	25	21.74%
Principal	18	15.25%	MA/MS	39	33.91%
Teacher	62	52.54%	SEd/Certificate	18	15.65%
Student	32	27.12%	EdD/PhD	11	9.57%
			Degree Candidate	22	19.13%
Grade Level of Instruction:			Years of Experience:		
Elementary	63	54.31%	1-5 years	31	30.69%
Middle	23	19.83%	6-10 years	11	10.89%
Secondary	24	20.69%	11-15 years	13	12.87%
College	6	5.17%	16-20 years	18	17.82%
			20+ years	28	27.72%

Quantitative Findings:

Respondents to the study were requested to rate their perceptions of the practicum program on a six point scale ranging from totally agree (numeric value of 5) to totally disagree (numerical value of 0). Responses were examined in terms of percentages and weighted scores.

Over 99 percent of the respondents perceived the practicum or early field experience to be a valuable component in a teacher education program for the purpose of orienting future teacher candidates to the profession. The greater majority agreed that these early field experiences should include activities which would eventually prepare the student for full time teaching. The respondents also felt that through the early field experiences, students should be provided with exposure to a variety of classroom settings and a variety of teaching styles. In addition, whenever possible, students should have the opportunity to model instructional techniques. When these types of activities took place, the greater majority of the population found their involvement in the practicum to be a positive experience.

Most respondents agreed that the practicum experience should allow for increased participation in classroom activities. However, diversity of experiences appeared to be more of a concern than the rate or level of increased responsibility.

The respondents did feel that the experience should reinforce theories taught in education and psychology classes. They also indicated that skills learned or observed in earlier practicums should be connected and built upon and that the practicum experience should be based upon a hierarchical sequence of skills.

Also highly rated was the perception that the future teacher could use the early field experience to assist them in making such decisions as what grade level they would like to teach or in what subject area they would like to specialize. There was also agreement that the practicum student did provide support and assistance to the classroom teacher.

It was not perceived that early field experiences should be more observational than participatory. Trained observation in general was not among the priorities cited by the respondents. Only 52.17 percent felt that trained observation should be a major component . Perceptions of practicum experiences by weighted score is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Rank Order Listing of General Perceptions of the Practicum Experience by Weighted Scores on a Scale of 5-0; 5 being the highest

The practicum or early field experience is a valuable component for orienting future teachers to the profession.	4.56
The practicum experience should include activities which prepare the student for full time teaching.	4.45
The practicum experience should be instrumental in providing exposure to a variety of classroom settings and a variety of teaching styles.	4.17
My involvement in the practicum was positive.	4.02
The practicum experience should allow the student to model instructional techniques.	4.02
The practicum should allow for increased participation in classroom activities.	3.98
The practicum should reinforce theories taught in teacher education classes.	3.91
The practicum experience should assist a student in deciding what grade level and/or subject they may want to teach.	3.80
The practicum experience should be based on a hierarchical sequence of skills which connects skills practiced in previous field experiences.	3.75
Integrating a practicum student into the classroom provides support and assistance to the classroom teacher.	3.60
The major component of the practicum should be trained observation.	2.62
The practicum experience should include more observation than participation.	2.13

Practicum Implementation:

As one of the primary purposes of this project was to review the early field experience to identify variables that might upgrade or improve the program, overall implementation of the program was reviewed. Respondents were asked to cite their perceptions on a variety of components.

Over 97.28% agreed that teacher education students should engage in two or more practicums prior to student teaching. All respondents agreed that these practicum experiences should afford students the opportunity to be placed in classrooms based on the subject matter, major or specific interest of the student as it relates to specific course requirements.

Generally all respondents agreed that the relationship between the Berry Education Department and the schools was both collegial and professional. The majority also felt that the communication channels between the Education Department and the schools were open and accessible in relation to the coordination of the practicum experiences. In addition, more than 95 percent of the respondents felt that the teachers were supportive of the efforts put forth by the practicum students.

A detailed list of activities which were to be met through an observable activity was provided to a majority of students in the Berry College program. Students placed a high value on this list as it provided direction to the student and established criteria for success within the context of the practicum.

The participants who answered the questionnaire agreed that students should experience a practicum in both public and private or alternative settings.

Participants in the study felt that the overall preparation of the students for practicum experiences was adequate. Approximately 83 percent totally agreed, strongly agreed or agreed. Just under 80 percent agreed that the purpose and goals of the practicum were clearly defined by the professor requiring the practicum in his or her course of study. Just under 70 percent agreed that the method of evaluation of the practicum was made clear by the professor. 77 percent suggested that there was sufficient time to achieve objectives and assignments during the practicum.

Slightly over half of the respondents, 52.69 percent, thought that the practicum should be an independent credit course rather than a component of an individual course. Less than 46 percent felt that a block practicum comprised of a group of practicum students engaged in the same activity at the same school was preferable to an individual placement. Table 3 presents data on the implementation of practicums.

Table 3

Perceptions of Practicum Implementation Reported by Percentages of Agreement

Components	Totally Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Totally Disagree
The goals of the practicum were clearly defined by the professor who is requiring the practicum in his/her course of study.	17.48	19.42	42.72	17.48	0.97	1.94
The method of evaluation was made clear by the professor requiring the practicum.	12.00	15.00	42.00	27.00	2.00	2.00
A detailed list of objectives was provided to the practicum student.	19.35	17.20	48.39	13.98	0.00	1.08
The preparation of the students for the practicum was adequate.	17.17	18.18	47.47	15.15	1.01	1.01
The teachers are supportive of the efforts put forth by the practicum students.	29.73	20.72	44.14	5.41	0.00	0.00
The relationship between the Berry Education Department and the school is collegial and professional.	32.43	22.52	36.94	6.31	0.90	0.90
The communication channels between the Berry Education Department and the school are open and accessible in relation to the coordination of the practicum experience.	26.17	19.63	38.32	13.08	0.93	1.87
Practicum students should be placed in classrooms based on the subject matter, major or interest of the student as it relates to specific course requirements.	36.84	27.19	35.96	0.00	0.00	0.00
Students should be required to experience practicums in both public and private or alternative settings.	27.27	12.73	34.55	22.73	1.82	0.91
Time spent in the classroom was sufficient to achieve the objectives and assignments of the practicum.	18.00	17.00	42.00	18.00	3.00	2.00
A block practicum comprised of a group of practicum students engaged in the same activity at the same school is preferable to an individualized placement.	10.64	10.64	24.47	45.74	5.32	3.19
The practicum should be an independent credit course which specifically deals with clinical field experience competencies rather than a component of an individual course.	11.83	15.05	25.81	31.18	7.53	8.60
Students should engage in at least 2 practicum experiences prior to student teaching.	52.73	14.55	30.00	2.73	0.00	0.00

Practicum Experiences and Competencies:

Practicum experiences and competencies learned or experienced during the early field experience were examined by weighted scores to assess the value placed on each individual competency by the respondents. A rank order listing of the competencies, as presented in Table 4, illustrates which areas were perceived to be of the greatest value and which areas were perceived to be of less value.

There was a general consensus that during each practicum or early field experience, students should develop an understanding of the range of responsibilities associated with the teaching profession. This range would include all facets from routine daily activities to complex procedures. The experiences which received the highest ratings were the provision to provide opportunities for the practicum student to use various strategies to provide positive reinforcement with children and for the practicum student to have the opportunity to observe how a teacher handles discipline in the classroom. It should be noted, however, that the actual implementation of discipline procedures by the practicum student was given a lessor rating.

Opportunities to be involved in lesson planning with their teachers was cited as a highly desired skill to be learned and practiced during the early field experience. This would include opportunities to develop and complete daily lesson plans for a given topic or unit of study. Over 62 percent rated this experience as extremely valuable and 35.56 percent rated it as valuable. Of equal importance was the actual opportunity to conduct a short lesson within a field experience or practicum activity. Over 94 percent cited that this experience should be included in the practicum experience. Within the context of designing lesson plans, respondents further suggested that opportunities to produce teacher made instructional materials be afforded. Approximately 53 percent found these skills to be extremely valuable and over 42 percent rated instructional materials development activities to be valuable. On the other hand, the development of such instructional devices as bulletin boards was not perceived to be as valuable an experience. This would suggest that the greater majority of the respondents were interested in directing the practicum students to tailor their lessons and extend or alter commercially produced curriculum materials to meet specific needs.

The respondents voiced an interest in evaluating the practicum student's performance. This might suggest that microteaching with the use of a video camera may be an activity which could be done in the schools.

Observation skills were also cited to be of value. The respondents valued the development of observation skills that could be used to collect information related to student behaviors. Equally important, was the opportunity to observe teachers actually engaged in various teaching practices. This might include direct teaching as well as

efforts at individualizing instruction or small grouping techniques. In this same area, the respondents placed value on practicum students developing the ability to diagnose students readiness and learning styles.

Opportunities to develop an understanding of school policies and procedures were rated to be of medium interest. This might be due to the fact that although school policies are similar, they represent differences in respect to specific issues. Similarly, respondents generally rated opportunities for the practicum student to review formal curriculum requirements such as the state syllabi or curriculum committee reports to be of medium valuable. Approximately 89 percent found it to be of value. However, on a weighted scale, it placed in the mid range in relation to other skill areas.

Certainly of importance, but of a lessor degree to the respondents, was the opportunity for practicum students to be involved in the everyday classroom management activities such as scheduling, attendance and the grading of papers. Also, rated within this same level of weighted value, was the opportunity for practicum students to interact with administrators, parents, the greater community or with support personnel such as resource specialists, media specialists or librarians. With the limited amount of time allocated for the practicum or early field experience, these types of activities may not be easy to implement. Likewise, opportunities to attend co-curricular activities and after school events may not be feasible.

Activities receiving low ratings included such things as requiring the practicum student to keep a log to document practicum experiences or requiring the practicum student to formally review an instructional method they observed being used. Over 30 percent of the respondents considered keeping a log of little value or not applicable at all, while 27 percent responded in the same manner concerning the formal review. Active or interactive assignments would appear to be preferable.

The lowest rated experience related to classroom housekeeping activities which are deemed necessary to maintain a good educational environment. In short, these chores have little educational value other than the fact that they exist and may help students develop an understanding of the wide range of teacher responsibilities. Given the time limitation, it is understandable why these skills may be less desirable. Table 4 presents practicum experiences and competencies in rank order by weighted score.

Table 4

Rank Order Listing of Practicum Experiences and Competencies by Weighted Scores on a Scale of 2-0; 2 being most valuable

The practicum student should develop an understanding of the range of responsibilities associated with the teaching profession.	1.86
The practicum student should observe how a teacher handles discipline and make specific notes.	1.69
The practicum student should be provided with opportunities to use positive reinforcement with children.	1.67
The practicum student should work with a teacher to plan a lesson.	1.65
The practicum student should have the opportunity to develop and complete lesson plans for a given topic or unit.	1.60
The practicum student should conduct a short lesson.	1.60
The practicum student should have the opportunity to produce teacher made materials.	1.49
The practicum student should be provided with the opportunity to evaluate his/her own performance and the outcomes of that performance.	1.49
The practicum practicum student should develop observational skills that can be used to collect information related to student behaviors.	1.48
The practicum student should have the opportunity to observe a teacher teaching and record notes of the observation.	1.48
The practicum student should develop the ability to diagnose students' readiness and learning styles.	1.42
The practicum student should be provided with the opportunity to assume increasingly greater responsibility for classroom teaching.	1.40
The practicum student should be provided with opportunities to implement discipline procedures consistent with the philosophy of the classroom and school.	1.38
The practicum student should be provided with direction on school policies and procedures.	1.35
The practicum student should have opportunities to exercise the appropriate voice quality in various situations.	1.33
The practicum student should develop an instructional device such as a bulletin board or other display.	1.32
The practicum student should have the opportunity to communicate with support personnel such as resource specialists, media specialists or librarians.	1.29
The practicum student should have opportunities to review formal curriculum requirements such as the state syllabi or curriculum committee reports.	1.25
The practicum student should be provided with the opportunity to be involved with the everyday classroom management activities such as scheduling, attendance, etc.	1.20
The practicum student should be provided with opportunities to interact with administrators, parents and the greater community.	1.15
The practicum student should participate in the grading of papers.	1.08
The practicum student should keep a log which spans the practicum to document their activities and experiences.	1.02
The practicum student should be required to formally review an instructional method used in the classroom.	0.99
The practicum student should be provided with the opportunity to attend co-curricular activities such as concerts, athletic events, club meetings, etc.	0.98
The practicum student should assume some of the classroom housekeeping chores such as cleaning up which are deemed necessary to maintain the educational environment.	0.80

Qualitative Findings:

Student review committees examined the free response section of the questionnaire and collectively examined the statements recorded during the interviewing process. Qualitative findings were then reported by school level in terms of strengths, weaknesses and suggestions for future consideration. In some cases, interviews and free response information was in direction contradiction to the quantitative data compiled from the first part of the survey. The following are summaries presented by teaching level. It is interesting to note the varying perceptions of participants by secondary, middle school and early childhood levels.

Secondary School Committee:

The difficulties faced by education professors, school system administrators, classroom teachers and education students in establishing and implementing an effective system of practicums in conjunction with course work are many. The time demands involved for all concerned, are long and demanding. Much effort is required to schedule practicums, match students with classroom teachers and develop standards and goals. Then, once a program is up and running, it deserves review. Changes are necessary to ensure that the effectiveness of the program is maintained and the focus is current to contemporary needs.

It is in this spirit that we approach our findings taken from recent surveys and interviews which included everyone involved in the practicum experience at the secondary education level. An attempt is made to constructively analyze the praise, criticism and suggestions taken from the free response portion of the surveys as well as from candid dialogue during the interview process.

Many comments were made concerning the strengths of the Berry practicum program. The responses from the teachers in the field spoke of the eagerness, enthusiasm and motivation of the secondary teacher education students and the fact that the practicum provided opportunities for students to observe different teaching methods and techniques for handling classroom management. Administrators also noted the motivation and enthusiasm of the students. Student responses reflected the sentiment that the practicum provided a good opportunity to experience "real life" classroom management. Overall, they also felt that it was a positive experience

because the relationship between the college and the school systems seemed to be very cooperative.

Weaknesses were definitely noted by the various groups. Classroom teachers most often cited the lack of time as a key weakness. This included lack of time with the students and the Berry professors. They noted difficulty in fully understanding the objectives of a given practicum. There is frustration on the part of some teachers with a lack of communication between the Berry professors and the classroom teachers. Student scheduling is irradiate, making it difficult to fully involve the practicum student in classroom activities. This, in turn, creates difficulty in monitoring actual student progress. Secondary students sometimes feel poorly prepared for the experience and equally unsure of the objectives to be met. Practicum students feel that some sort of guidance structure is needed after they are placed in the field.

The suggestions to improve the program were varied. Most felt that overall it was a solid program, but that there was room for refinement. Teachers most often cited a need for a clearer statement of objectives and an improved scheduling system. Administrators felt that it was essential for the practicum students to spend more time in the classroom. They also indicated that classroom teachers were being asked to take the lion's share of the responsibility for the conduct of the practicum without real guidance and aid from the Berry faculty. Education student suggestions coincided with the responses of both administrators and classroom teachers.

Based on our findings a compiled list of specific suggestions to enhance the practicum program follows:

1. Professors should develop, in concert, a standard set of general goals and objectives for the practicum experience, with each individual professor supplementing the list with specific objectives that apply to individual courses. These objectives should be kept on file in the Office of Teacher Education and Field Services so that informed communication can transpire.

2. These objectives should be thoroughly discussed with the classroom teachers before the teacher becomes involved with the program. Perhaps an annual meeting of Berry faculty, classroom teachers and administrators should be conducted to discuss problems and fine tune objectives.

3. Encourage students to substitute teach, if possible. This will help to provide students with a realistic view of the profession at an early stage in their studies.

4. A teacher information sheet should be filled out by participating classroom teachers prior to each term in which they will be hosting students. It should include the classroom teacher's schedule, acceptable times for students to be in the classroom and preferred times for students to contact the teacher.

5. Likewise, a student information sheet should be given to the classroom teacher. It should provide pertinent information concerning the student's field of studies, expected graduation date and previous classroom experience.

6. The practicum should be incorporated into coursework on a laboratory type of schedule. It should be credited course work in its own right. Practicum labs should be registered for separately, but in conjunction with the appropriate course work.

7. A full-time practicum and student-teacher coordinator should be assigned, who has no other responsibilities. This would be to ensure efficient scheduling and communications between faculty, students, school administrators and classroom teachers.

We recognize that time is a precious commodity. However, we as a committee, feel this program is preparing society's future educators and these efforts at refinement of the practicum experience are essential in order to maintain Berry's reputation for preparing future teachers.

Middle School Committee:

The review project concerning the teacher education field experiences yielded some interesting results in the middle school area.

Each segment of the population reviewed, provided input as to the strengths of the program. One of the main strengths cited was the practicum's role as a precursory experience to student teaching. According to education students, the practicum afforded them the opportunity to develop a more comfortable feeling towards student

teaching. It also allowed the education student to see what teaching is really like and the opportunity to work in an actual classroom setting. Additionally, many classroom teachers and principals stated that it assisted the student in building a history with area schools.

There were many comments made concerning the weaknesses of the field experience program at Berry. The most critical comments came from classroom teachers. They seem to feel that there is not enough communication between Berry faculty and the local schools. The classroom teachers commented that they feel confused about what is expected of them. Further, many of the education students commented that the program seems disorganized and that goals were not made clear by many of the individual professors who require the practicum experience as part of their course requirements.

Suggestions for improvements of the practicum experience were made by all segments of the survey population. The suggestions included:

1. Education students should be required to develop lesson plans and to teach in the practicum setting as often as possible. This was stressed repeatedly by the classroom teachers as well as the Berry faculty.

2. The practicum student might come for two weeks in a row as opposed to one day per week over the course of a six week period. Many comments were made which cited that it was difficult to become familiar with the classroom setting with just a one day per week visitation.

3. There was a general feeling that observation alone is not enough - the education student learns more by actual participation in the classroom.

4. As many experiences and observations should be required of the practicum student in as many different grade levels as possible. This approach would allow the practicum student more exposure to various teaching styles.

Early Childhood Education:

Many comments were collected from respondents who participate in the practicum experience at the early childhood or elementary school level. Therefore, the analysis of these responses was broken down and reported by involvement in the program.

School Principal and Administrators Perceptions:

As with all programs or courses of study, there is always room for improvement even though the program has many strengths. This seems to be the attitude of the principals in the Rome area. The doors to the principals' offices were opened freely and they were grateful to be allowed the opportunity for input into the Berry Education program. The attitudes of these principals were consistent. They felt that the practicum experience was a valuable tool of education courses, and that it was beneficial for the education student to have as much exposure to the classroom as possible. Observation on the part of the practicum student versus participating in actual instruction was not necessarily an issue as the principals felt that much could be learned through observation. Exposure was their main concern, whether it be in the form of teaching, observing, cleaning up or grading papers - as all of these tasks are part of the reality of teaching.

The classroom teachers in the field which accept practicum students enjoy having them and appreciate the privilege of sharing their profession with the students. Principals assign the education students to the individual teachers. One of the criterion they use to make this assignment is based upon a teacher's desire to have a practicum student in their classroom.

The principals indicated that they liked having practicum students, and in fact, would like to continue to have more. Principals from schools geographically located furthest from the Berry College campus especially cited their desire for more involvement in the program. The principals were very proud of their respective schools and in the responsibility of guiding that school towards the future. One way they felt they could address this, would be to become more involved in the shaping of future teachers.

Berry College Faculty Perceptions:

The interviews of professors who teach courses requiring practicums, indicated that the faculty viewed the early field experience as an opportunity for the education student to gain practical experience in the classroom and try out different instructional approaches without having full responsibility for a class of students. This real world experience allows the education student to develop familiarity with children and their behavior. It also enables the practicum student to build self confidence in their knowledge and abilities.

None of the professors interviewed by our committee, believed that they should give detailed lists of what the practicum student is expected to do. They felt that providing a guideline for the student, as well as the teacher in the field, was a better approach. The guideline allows for variation and leeway for both the practicum student and the cooperating teacher.

The professors believed that the current practicum program at Berry College has many strengths. Several of the education courses require practicum experiences. This allows students the opportunity to gain experiences in the classroom before assuming the role of a student teacher. Some of the professors in the early childhood education program have implemented a "block" practicum for their reading, language arts and children's literature classes. In the block practicum, all students engage in the practicum experience at the same time in one or two schools. The course of the practicum usually spans three days per week for two weeks. This enables the professor to identify a desired goal for all students in the course. In addition, it allows the professor to observe and give feedback to the education students regarding their performance in the classroom.

Weaknesses were also cited in the current practicum program. The professors indicated that too many students were registered in the courses for the faculty to be able to observe individual students and provide one-to-one conferences. When Berry changed its program from the quarter system back to the semester system, class sizes were increased.

Other recommendations included:

1. Increasing the number of "block" practicums would benefit the program at Berry.

2. More professors are needed so that smaller class sizes may be achieved.

3. The middle grades education courses might be staggered since these courses usually have a small number of students. One solution might be to offer these courses every other year so that the faculty now teaching middle grades courses could spend more time teaching early childhood education courses.

Classroom Teachers and Education Students Perceptions:

The strengths most often cited related specifically towards the Berry program were that the Berry program indicated a desire for the education students to develop the skills and knowledge which are necessary to prepare for the teaching profession. In addition high student interest and the students' commitment to their work were the two most frequently reported strengths. The teachers also felt that there was a positive working relationship between the Berry Education Department and the individual schools and between the education students and their teachers in the field. The practicum experienced was perceived to help students in the transition from student to teacher by providing exposure to a wide variety of grade level settings and a variety of teaching styles, as well as giving the students actual practice in lesson plan development and implementation. The education students viewed the practicums to be a valuable experience and indicated they like the idea of participating in practicums during all of their four years of study. Overall the practicum experience was perceived to be important and should continue to be included as a major part of a teacher education program.

The most disturbing weakness cited was a lack of professionalism and enthusiasm on the part of some of the education students towards their practicum experiences. One way to address this might be to develop better communications between education students and professors, education students and teachers in the field and professors and teachers in the field. Expectation levels may not be defined as clearly by professors as the teachers in the field and the practicum students might need. A perceived lack of communication could develop when practicum students are

unsure of their duties in the classroom or when there is no observation of the practicum students from the professor requiring the practicum experience. The primary goal of the education student is to receive practical experiences which will be beneficial to them in the future. The majority of teachers in the field are willing to allow that experience to occur in their classrooms. The redefining of the practicum experience for all members involved may ultimately allow this goal to be achieved.

Many respondents had similar opinions concerning other weaknesses of the program. Frequently cited was that the practicum experience was not long enough and that the gaps between classroom meetings were too large to allow for effective consistency. Several respondents felt that there was too much "busy work" and not enough teaching time required of the practicum students. Often, there was too much observation and not enough direct interaction with the classroom children. Suggestions to address this included providing more practice lessons with fellow education students, more time in class, more experience in dealing with matters related to discipline, more specific projects related to classroom needs and simply more actual teaching.

Additional general suggestions which were made included:

1. Students should spend more time teaching during the practicum experience, instead of just observing someone else teaching.

2. There should be more communication between the practicum students, the Berry College faculty, the teachers and principals in the field during the practicum experience so that everyone involved knows exactly what is and should be going on.

3. Berry College should schedule its education courses so that education students have one day a week free to go to their practicum sites and possibly be put on a substitute teacher list in order to gain real life experience.

4. The addition of a separate credit course called "practicum experience" was highly stressed. This would reduce the scheduling problems student encounter with the practicum requirement being built into each course.

Conclusions:

All respondents to the assessment project placed a high value on the practicum or early field experience. Further, they considered this component to be a major strength of a teacher education program.

According to an analysis of the survey responses, the practicum experience should be designed to provide more active participation rather than a great deal of passive observation. This active participation should include modeling of instructional techniques and possible engagement in microteaching activities. In addition, highly rated practicum activities including involving the practicum students in lesson plan development and implementation with their cooperating teacher. This would include unit and daily lesson plans. Providing opportunities for education students to develop instructional materials for these lesson plans was also rated as valuable.

In terms of practicum implementation, a slight majority of the respondents would suggest that the practicum should be an independent credit course rather than a component of an existing course. In addition, standards, goals and objectives should be formalized and kept on file in order to facilitate better communications amongst the groups involved in the practicum program (faculty, administrators and teachers in the field and education students). Moreover, these materials should be thoroughly discussed with the classroom teachers so they have a direct understanding of the expectations of the program.

During interviewing procedures and an analysis of the free response section of the questionnaire, suggestions for practicum improvement were identified amongst respondents according to the level of education in which they were involved. Respondents from the secondary level suggested that the practicum should be incorporated into the college curriculum and scheduled as a laboratory type course. They also recommended that practicum supervision be coordinated by a full time administrative coordinator and not be treated as a supplementary responsibility.

Respondents from the middle school level had in interest in using a block type of practicum. The practicum would be scheduled everyday for two weeks rather than once a week for six weeks as is presently the practice in most courses.

At the early elementary level, principals and teachers desired more involvement in the program. They also indicated that they would like to have more communications with the Berry faculty, such as scheduled meetings, in order to identify and develop practicum content.

Berry College education faculty suggested that they needed flexibility in assignments and would prefer to provide simple guidelines rather than using a more structured approach. They were also concerned about large class size which they felt had an impact on practicum assignments and class activities in general.

Finally, faculty in the Department of Education and Psychology should review the information within this report and examine the data and recommendations in order to enable future program development.

Summary:

Although this class project was complex, it provided teacher education candidates with real life experience in group decision making processes. Students also developed an orientation towards assessing a program in a variety of ways and in directing future curriculum development processes based on existing data and recommendations collected from actual participants. Group decision making will be a major influence in the education industry in the coming decade. As the concept of teacher empowerment becomes commonplace in every school in America, peer leadership development should be a focal point in both pre-service and in-service professional development at institutions of higher education as well as in the schools themselves. This practicum review was an experiment towards these ends.